



Fresh School Meals

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HARVEST PEPPERS TO WARM YOUR SOUL

Harvest in our great Southwest floods the eye with all the colors of the sunset from the chile or pepper family.

First of all, the world knows the vegetable family of peppers as chiles, while in the United States they are commonly called peppers. Obviously the true peppercorn is the dried tropical berry from a low vine plant. The chiles we talk about here are the fresh and dried vegetables also known as peppers which grow on a small free standing plant. Chili powder (with an i) is made with dried chiles (chile peppers) but with other spices such as cumin. The dish chili is the meat and tomato concoction seasoned with chili powder.



When Christopher Columbus set sail to find a new route to the spice islands in search of peppercorns and other exotic spices he discovered instead the Americas. He indeed did find a native pepper but unlike any that the Western civilization had ever seen before. This new chile or pepper was quite powerful with many varieties with different degrees of "bite", shapes and colors but they all started in the Americas--South and Central.

South American Indians began eating the wild chiles some time be-

tween 6500 and 5000 BC. The Incas and Aztecs were cultivating them by the time the first conquistadors arrived. From Mexico, the chiles moved northward into our own southwestern United States where it was popularly accepted by the Pueblo Indians.

The chile peppers all belong to the Capsicum family. It can have a mild to fiery hot flavor which is caused by the capsaicin development in the chile pepper, primarily centered around the inner seed. The development of the capsaicin is directly related to the night time growing temperature. The hotter the night, the hotter the pepper!

Chile peppers are rated by growers, dealers, and producers on their heat effect on a scale from 1 to 120. Jalapeno peppers, which can numb and blister the mouth and lips of the unaccustomed palate, is rated a mere 15. Poblanos and Anaheim are milder chiles very common in your local markets which pack a little spicy bite, are rated lower. On the other end of the heat spectrum is the Habanero or Scotch Bonnet chile, which are considered amongst the hottest grown in Central America and the Caribbean, a mere 30 to 50 times hotter than a Jalapeno.

It is believed that the ingestion of chiles has a positive effect on

those suffering from arthritis and that they aid in the digestive process. Chiles are known to be anti-carcinogens meaning they aid in the fight against cancer.



It is important to remember that the hot chile bite goes beyond the palate to anything it touches, including your hands. Hot chile bite will transfer from your hands to your eyes or anywhere else you touch, so be careful. A word to the wise...when handling hot chilies, you may want to wear rubber gloves.

There are three ways to cook these guys. The traditional method dips the chile pepper in an egg wash then dredged through corn meal and into a deep fryer to cook to a browned, crispy finish. This creates a terrific classical relenos. You can also coat the chile pepper as previously described then saute the exterior to set before finishing in the oven to allow the heat to penetrate into the filling. The final method we are using here today does not coat the chile pepper but simply roasts it in a pan with a little liquid to forgo the added carbohydrates.



BBQ SPICED CHICKEN CHILE RELLENOS

Makes 4 servings

Prep time 30 minutes Cook time 20 minutes



Ingredients:

- 4 medium Poblano Chile Peppers
Substitute Medium Red Bells
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 onion, peeled and diced
- 2 teaspoons ground New Mexican Chili powder
- 1 pound chicken breast, skinless, boneless cut in strips
- 1/4 cup BBQ Sauce
- Sea salt
- Tabasco to your taste - Optional
- 1 cup smoked mozzarella or Gouda cheese, grated
- 1/4 cup snipped fresh chives
- 1 lime juiced
- 1/4 cup sour cream
- 1/4 cup cilantro sprigs

Directions

Over a preheated grill roast the Poblano peppers until the skin is evenly blackened. Remove from the heat and place in a bowl, covering with plastic. Allow to cool to room temperature. Remove the skins from the chile peppers with paper toweling. Reserve.

In a large non stick skillet heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the garlic and onions cooking until softened and beginning to brown. Add the chili powder and the chicken cooking until almost completely done, about 3 minutes. Add the BBQ sauce cooking until thickened and coating the chicken. Season with salt and a generous shot of Tabasco to your taste. Remove from the heat to a medium bowl. Allow to cool for a few minutes then stir in the cheese, chives and half of the lime juice, mixing well.

Prepare the green chile peppers by cutting a small incision from just below the stem to 2/3rds down the length. Carefully remove the seeds and inner core. Divide the shrimp filling and carefully stuff the peppers then reseal the opening. Place the stuffed chile peppers incision side up in a medium pan. Add a little water to keep moist and place on the lower rack of a 375 degree F. preheated oven. Bake until the center is hot, about 15 to 20 minutes. Remove from the oven.

In a small bowl mix the sour cream and the remaining spoon of lime juice. Season with salt to your taste.

To Serve: Carefully transfer the stuffed chile pepper onto the center of the sauce, incision down or to the side. Spoon a dollop of the sour cream atop the stuffed chile pepper. Sprinkle the cilantro sprigs across the sour cream sauce.

Serve immediately.

Jimmy Schmidt

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Additional Recipes



From USDA's Recipe Finder Database:

<http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/schoolmeals/Recipes/recipefinder.php>

- Barbecue Turkey Burger with Roasted Red Peppers
- Vegetable Chili
- Chicken Fajitas
- Marinated Black Bean Salad
- Arroz con Queso (Rice with Cheese)
- Veg-Out Chili Bowl
- Easy Couscous Wrap

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